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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 000674

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [BA](#) [REGION](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S FAREWELL CALL ON FOREIGN MINISTER
SHAIKH KHALID

REF: A. MANAMA 650 B. MANAMA 662

Classified By: Ambassador William T. Monroe. Reason: 1.4 (B)(D)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Summary. Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid, during the Ambassador's July 17 farewell call, had high praise for the bilateral relationship, urging that Bahrain and other GCC countries move from being "allies" to becoming true "partners." In that connection, he welcomed the July 31 meeting of the GCC 2, calling that forum extremely important. He said that new Middle East envoy Tony Blair would visit Bahrain July 25. He gave additional insights into Bahrain's dust-up last week with Iran over a statement suggesting Bahrain was Iran's 14th province. He said that Bahrain handled it very carefully as it did not want it to affect Bahrain's internal situation (in other words, exacerbate the sensitive Sunni-Shia sectarian divide). He related that Iranian FM Muttaqi almost canceled his visit to resolve the issue when he learned of an anti-Iranian demonstration outside the Iranian Embassy. After the issue was resolved, Shaikh Khalid flew to Saudi Arabia to thank King Abdullah for Saudi Arabia's expression of support. King Abdullah rebuffed a request by Shaikh Khalid to increase production at a jointly-held off-shore oil field.

BILATERAL RELATIONS: NOT JUST ALLIES, BUT PARTNERS

¶2. (C) The Ambassador opened his July 17 farewell call on Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid by expressing appreciation for Bahrain's close cooperation with the United States on regional issues and, more specifically, Shaikh Khalid's personal support for U.S. policies in the region, especially on the Israel-Palestinian issue. The Ambassador noted that, with the return of the fifth Bahrain detainee the evening before (Saudi/Bahraini dual citizen Juma Al-Dossari, who was sent to Saudi Arabia), there was just one Bahraini detainee left at Guantanamo. This issue, which had put some local pressure on the Foreign Ministry, was thus almost behind us. At the same time, the successful visit the week before of an NDI delegation, which led to an agreement for NDI to resume programming in the fall, had hopefully put behind us an issue that had been of considerable concern to the United States. With the FTA successfully in place, and Bahrain playing an increasingly active role in Navy coalition operations, the bilateral relationship was currently in good shape.

¶3. (C) Shaikh Khalid had high praise for the bilateral relationship. He said that it was time for Bahrain, and the other countries in the GCC, to move from being "allies" of the United States to becoming true "partners." Bahrain's

position, he said, is that the U.S. and the GCC should have a "shared vision, shared policies." In that regard, he welcomed the news that Secretary Rice will host a meeting of the GCC 2 in Egypt on July 31. Although he will be on vacation in France at the time, he will fly to Egypt for the meeting and looks forward to fruitful discussions. The GCC 2 process is extremely important, he stressed.

PRESIDENT'S SPEECH WELCOMED

14. (C) Shaikh Khalid welcomed the President's July 16 speech on the Middle East, and the indication it gave of serious engagement by the United States on supporting peace in the Middle East. He focused specifically on the statement that the U.S. would convene an international meeting this fall to discuss Middle East peace, and wondered when and where the meeting would be held and whom would be invited.

TONY BLAIR COMING TO BAHRAIN

15. (C) Shaikh Khalid stated that new Middle East envoy Tony Blair will visit Bahrain July 25, arriving from Tel Aviv. He will meet with Crown Prince Shaikh Salman (in the absence of the King, who is out of the country) and Deputy Prime Minister Shaikh Mohammed bin Mubarak. Shaikh Khalid expressed appreciation that Blair was coming, and said Bahrain looked forward to hearing what he had to say.

FLARE-UP WITH IRAN: HANDLED CAREFULLY

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16. (C) Shaikh Khalid gave some additional insights on Bahrain's dust-up last week with Iran over a statement by Kayhan editor Shariatmadari claiming that Bahrain was the 14th province of Iran (reftels). Bahrain handled it "very carefully," he stated. "We did not want this issue to affect our internal situation. It was like putting oil on a fire, hour by hour. So we stopped it quickly. Thank God this episode is behind us."

17. (C) When the story broke in Kayhan, Shaikh Khalid stated, they called in the Iranian CDA who dismissed the article as simply a media report. Shaikh Khalid asked that the Iranian Government to make a public statement. The CDA said he would relay the message to Tehran. When the Iranian government failed to make statement, the MFA called the CDA back in the next day and asked what happened. He replied that the positive statement made the day before by President Ahmadinejad during the presentation of credentials by Bahrain's new Ambassador was enough. Unsatisfied, Shaikh Khalid prepared a note of protest and told the press he would meet with Bahrain's parliament the next day to discuss Bahrain's position. At that point, Iranian Foreign Minister Muttaqi, who had planned to transit Bahrain for one hour on his way home from Tunis, asked to extend the stopover so that he could meet the King and the Foreign Minister. Bahrain decided to accept the visit, postpone delivering the protest note, and see what Muttaqi had to say.

18. (C) Muttaqi almost didn't come. On the eve of his planned arrival on July 13, a protest demonstration in front of the Iranian Embassy led the Iranian CDA to contact Muttaqi and tell him not to come. Upon hearing this, Shaikh Khalid called Muttaqi and urged him to proceed with the visit. With news of the planned visit already in the press, Shaikh Khalid told him, there would be an even bigger problem for Bahrain if he suddenly canceled. Muttaqi said that he was concerned that Bahrain would use the visit to stir up anti-Iranian sentiments, but after talking to Shaikh Khalid agreed to come.

¶9. (C) As reported ref b, Muttaqi gave Bahrain the assurances it wanted during his visit. He met Shaikh Khalid and, in the absence of the King, Crown Prince Shaikh Salman. The Crown Prince told Shaikh Khalid before his meeting with Muttaqi that he would ask point blank if Iran recognized Bahrain as a sovereign country, and if the answer was not yes he intended to walk out of the meeting. In the end, Muttaqi gave him the answer he wanted, although he did make the point that anti-Iranian comments by Bahraini columnist Sameera Rajab, a member of the King-appointed Shura Council, were essentially of the same nature as the comments by Kayhan editor Shariatmadari. Shaikh Khalid acknowledged to the Ambassador that Muttaqi did have a point. Muttaqi also pressed for an early convening of the new joint committee on bilateral cooperation, but the Bahrainis pushed it back to the autumn.

RELATIONS WITH SAUDI ARABIA

¶10. (C) During this episode, Saudi King Abdullah called King Hamad, who is in London, to express his support for Bahrain. Once the issue had been resolved, King Hamad dispatched Shaikh Khalid to Jeddah to personally thank the Saudi leader for his expression of support. King Abdullah told Shaikh Khalid that the Gulf is a red line as far as Iran is concerned and that "we are there to help you."

¶11. (C) Shaikh Khalid said that during his meeting with King Abdullah he raised an issue that continues to rankle the Bahrainis: Saudi Arabia's unwillingness to raise production at the jointly-owned Abu Safah offshore oil field. He said that Aramco has told Bahrain oil company Bapco that the field has good potential for expansion. In this meeting, Shaikh Khalid said, King Abdullah shrugged of his request. Shaikh Khalid urged U.S. help with the Saudis on this issue.

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